MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

2

ORIGINAL CONCEPT
AKUMI AGITOGI
(Fujimi L Bunko/KADOKAWA)

ART
RITO KOHSAKA

CHARACTER DESIGN
TSUKIHO TSUKIOKA

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Chapter 8: A Present for Him

WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HE LIKE?

I'M THINKING OF GIVING LORD KUDO A GIFT OF SOME KIND.

BUT I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT AND I CAN'T COME UP WITH ANYTHING.

UM, YURIE?

IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONVEY GRATITUDE THROUGH WORDS, OF COURSE.

BUT I WANT TO GIVE FORM TO MY FEELINGS.

I'VE WANTED TO DO THIS EVER SINCE HE GAVE ME THE COMB.

I STILL HAVEN'T DONE SOMETHING TO THANK HIM FOR LETTING ME STAY HERE.

MADE MYSELF?

AND SOMETHING YOU'VE MADE YOURSELF WOULD BE EVEN BETTER.

SOMETHING HE CAN USE EVERY DAY WOULD BE NICE.

OH GOOD-NESS.

...IS TOO SHABBY FOR HIS TASTES?

HE HAS SUCH A DISCERNING EYE. WHAT IF HE THINKS THAT WHATEVER I MAKE...

I AM CERTAIN HE WILL BE DELIGHTED WITH WHATEVER YOU MAKE HIM.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. I DOUBT THE YOUNG MASTER WOULD FEEL THAT WAY AT ALL.

YOU'RE SUCH A SWEET GIRL, LADY MIYO.

HEE HEE

SQUIRM

OH, BUT I CAN'T CONTROL THAT, CAN I?

STILL, I WANT HIM TO LIKE IT.

SQUIRM

SHE'S SO POSITIVE ABOUT IT, WHICH GIVES ME A STRANGE SENSE OF RELIEF.

ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THIS IS COMING FROM YURIE, WHO PRACTICALLY RAISED LORD KUDO.

YOU THINK SO?

I DO!

HMP!

I HAVE JUST THE THING!

WHAT COULD I MAKE HIM...?

WAIT RIGHT THERE.

TMP
TMP
TMP

OH MY. I DIDN'T KNOW BOOKS LIKE THESE EXISTED.

March Edition

THEY'RE SO PRETTY!

Make It Yourself!

《Cloth Bag》

《Glasses Case》

《Pouch》

WHY NOT CHOOSE ONE OF THESE TO MAKE?

A HANDKERCHIEF MIGHT BE NICE TOO.

Pouch

Fold

Sew

(inside)

(inside)

A DRAWSTRING POUCH WOULD BE EASY.

I SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE SOMETHING.

THE INSTRUCTIONS ARE EASY TO FOLLOW.

DID YOU FIND SOMETHING?

YES. THIS ONE.

OH!

<Braided Cord>

①

②

③

THE DESIGN IS SO BEAUTIFUL AND DELICATE.

I THINK IT WOULD LOOK VERY NICE IN HIS HAIR.

AND HE COULD NEVER HAVE TOO MANY.

OH MY! A BRAIDED CORD!

OH YES! THAT'S A WONDERFUL IDEA!

YOU HAVE MY FULL SUPPORT.

OH? WHY?

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU NEED?

LORD KUDO?

I'D LIKE TO GO INTO TOWN SOMETIME SOON.

IS THAT...

...ALL RIGHT?

YES. I'VE PICKED SOMETHING OUT I'D LIKE TO PURCHASE MYSELF.

I...

...I THINK SO?

WILL YOU BE SAFE?

...ARE YOU GOING ALONE?

OF COURSE IT IS. BUT...

I WANT TO GO DURING THE DAY WITH YURIE.

OH, UM... NO.

BUT I'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

CAN I NOT GO WITH YOU?

AND HE'S SO BUSY. I COULDN'T MAKE HIM COME WITH ME.

I'D BE TOO EMBARRASSED IF HE KNEW.

I KNOW.

YOU WORRY TOO MUCH.

DO NOT FOLLOW ANY STRANGERS.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

OKAY.

BE CAREFUL, THEN.

SIGH...

YOU'RE GOING SHOPPING TODAY, AREN'T YOU?

YES.

CHIRP CHIRP CHIRP

IT'S AN AMULET.

TAKE THIS.

YES.

NEVER, EVER LET IT LEAVE YOUR PERSON. ALL RIGHT?

OH... THANK YOU.

OF—

OF COURSE I DO.

I WAS SO HAPPY THAT HE WAS CONCERNED FOR ME...

...THAT I COULD SCARCELY HOLD BACK THE URGE TO SMILE.

HMPH

DO YOU TRULY UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING?

I HOPE SO.

HAVE A GOOD DAY.

I'M OFF.

THE MOOD IN THE TATSUISHI HOUSEHOLD HASN'T BEEN GOOD LATELY.

HE'S ANGRY BECAUSE THINGS AREN'T GOING THE WAY HE WANTS.

WHAT A RAMPAGE.

MY BROTHER DOESN'T SEEM TO CARE.

CRAAASH

ONE VERY BIG REASON IS THAT MY FATHER, LORD TATSUISHI, IS EXTREMELY OUT OF SORTS.

BUT THAT MAKES EVERYTHING IN THIS HOUSE FEEL AWFUL.

THE SERVANTS ARE TENSE. THEY DON'T WANT TO MAKE FATHER'S MOOD WORSE.

MOTHER HAS WITHDRAWN INTO HERSELF.

PEOPLE ALWAYS CALL ME A CALM PERSON.

BUT THE TRUTH IS, IT'S JUST THAT I RARELY TAKE MY ANGER OUT ON OTHERS.

THAT DOESN'T MEAN I DON'T HAVE INTENSE EMOTIONS.

HEY KOJI?

I HAVE TO MARRY THIS WOMAN.

...WITH THE WOMAN THAT ABUSED HER.

AND SPEND DECADES OF MY LIFE TO COME...

AH YES.

RIGHT.

COME SHOPPING WITH ME!

BUT EVEN SO...

I'LL GO WITH YOU.

SURE THING.

...I'LL PLAY THE PART OF NICE GUY KOJI TATSUISHI.

I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PROTECT HER.

THAT WAY, I CAN KEEP A CLOSER EYE ON THE SAIMORIS THAN ANYONE ELSE.

ALL SO THAT NO HARM COMES TO THE ONE I HOLD MOST DEAR.

General
WHICH ONE WILL YOU CHOOSE, LADY MIYO?
WOW...
HMM. LET'S SEE.
I HAD NO IDEA THERE WERE SO MANY COLORS.

THEY'RE TOO SIMILAR TO THE BLACK CORDS HE USUALLY USES.

A DEEP OR-INDIGO-BLUE MIGHT BE NICE, BUT THEY'RE TOO PLAIN.

I THINK A THICKER CORD WOULD MATCH HIS PALE HAIR BEST.

I DON'T THINK HE'D LIKE BRIGHT COLORS, SO I'LL AVOID THOSE.

OH NO.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PICK.

BUT IT ISN'T STRESSFUL WONDERING WHICH TO GO WITH.

IT FEELS SPECIAL.

I'M HAPPY.

O-OKAY.

WE HAVE PLENTY OF TIME.

NO NEED TO RUSH.

I COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED MYSELF...

...DOING SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE OF MY OWN WILL.

I'VE ALWAYS DONE WHAT I WAS TOLD TO DO AND ENDURED EVERYTHING THROWN AT ME.

THAT WAS MY WHOLE LIFE.

I NEVER KNEW THAT MAKING SOMEONE A GIFT...

...WHILE PICTURING HOW HAPPY THEY'LL LOOK COULD BRING ME SO MUCH JOY.

EVEN IF THIS DOES NOT LAST LONG...

...I OWE LORD KUDO NOTHING BUT GRATITUDE FOR ALLOWING ME TO EXPERIENCE...

...SUCH HAPPINESS.

THE CORD IS CHEAP, AS I CAN'T AFFORD BETTER, AND I'M A COMPLETE AMATEUR AT THIS.

I DOUBT HE'LL BE VERY HAPPY TO RECEIVE A GIFT LIKE THIS.

ME TOO. I CAN'T WAIT TO START BRAIDING.

I'M SO GLAD YOU FOUND A NICE COLOR.

BUT I STILL CAN'T HELP BUT IMAGINE...

...WHAT SORT OF FACE HE'LL MAKE WHEN I GIVE IT TO HIM.

OH NO. THIS IS MY JOB, AND I COULDN'T POSSIBLY ALLOW IT.

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO GO?

WAIT HERE FOR JUST A MOMENT, LADY MIYO.

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

OH! I NEED TO BUY SALT.

MURMUR

MURMUR

MURMUR

...HELPLESS.

I FEEL SO...

I SHOULD HAVE GONE WITH YURIE.

AS I STAND HERE, WATCHING PEOPLE PASS ME BY...

...IT FEELS AS THOUGH I'M BEING LEFT BEHIND.

I KNOW THAT VOICE.

I'D KNOW IT ANYWHERE.

OH! IF IT ISN'T MY DEAR ELDER SISTER!

K—

KAYA...

MURMUR

KAYA...

WHAT A BEAUTY SHE IS!

MURMUR

K—

MURMUR?

Chapter 9: What I Hate Most...

SMILE

I DIDN'T THINK I'D RUN INTO YOU HERE.

WHAT A SURPRISE!

I HONESTLY THOUGHT YOU'D BE ROTTING IN A DITCH BY NOW.

HOW COULD YOU HAVE EVER BEEN A GOOD MATCH FOR HIM?

YOU'RE USELESS.

YOU MUST BE THRILLED JUST TO BE ALIVE.

OH, HOW I PITY YOU!

BUT HERE YOU ARE, LOITERING AROUND IN THAT UNSIGHTLY GETUP, AS USUAL.

LORD KUDO THREW YOU OUT, DIDN'T HE?

KAYA, YOU SHOULDN'T ...

SHUT UP, KOJI.

YOINK

I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE.

HEE HEE!

DEAR, DEAR SISTER.

DO LET ME KNOW IF YOU EVER NEED ANY MONEY, WON'T YOU?

IF YOU THROW YOURSELF ON THE GROUND AND BEG...

...THEN I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.

...

I WANT ...

...TO TELL HER OFF.

I-I...

GRIP

BUT I'VE LEFT NOW, AND I'M NEVER GOING BACK, SO...

I WAS NEVER ALLOWED TO TALK BACK TO KAYA AT HOME.

...I'M...

...SORRY.

AWW, JUST SILENCE? LIKE ALWAYS?

I...

YOU'RE THE SAME NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO, AREN'T YOU?

シーン WOBBLE

I NEVER USED TO CRY.

BUT ONCE KAYA SHOWS UP, MY FEAR TAKES OVER AGAIN.

STOP APOLO-GIZING.

I THOUGHT I'D CHANGED A LITTLE SINCE THEN.

I NEVER CHANGE, AND THAT DISAP-POINTS ME THE MOST.

BUT...

...I CAN'T START CRYING NOW.

BUT MY HEART HAS GROWN SOFT...

...THROUGH LORD KUDO AND YURIE'S KINDNESS.

KAYA WOULD ONLY DELIGHT IN MY WEAKNESS.

LADY MIYO?

OH!

HELLO.

IS THIS SOME-ONE YOU WORK WITH?

I HOPE YOU DIDN'T WAIT TOO LONG.

WHO MIGHT THESE PEOPLE BE?

I'M MIYO SAIMORI'S YOUNGER SISTER, KAYA.

SMILE

I'M SURE SHE LOVES WORKING WITH YOU.

ANYONE WOULD MISTAKE HER FOR NICE AND SWEET WITH THAT SMILE.

WILL YURIE TAKE KAYA'S SIDE NOW, TOO?

THAT WOULD MEAN THAT MAYBE ONE DAY...

...LORD KUDO WOULD ALSO—

I'M YURIE. IT'S LOVELY TO MEET YOU.

HOWEVER, I AM FAR BELOW LADY MIYO'S STATION.

SHE IS CERTAINLY NOT ANYONE I WORK WITH.

LADY MIYO IS VERY IMPORTANT TO OUR HOUSE.

YES.

SHE IS TO ONE DAY BE MY MASTER'S WIFE.

WIFE?

LADY MIYO IS TO BE LORD KIYOKA KUDO'S WIFE.

DID I HEAR THAT CORRECTLY ?

WH—

I SUPPOSE YOU NEVER CAN TRUST THE RUMOR MILL.

OR PERHAPS HE SIMPLY COULD NOT CARE LESS.

L-LORD KUDO IS SATISFIED WITH THE LIKES OF *HER?*

WHAT AN OPEN-MINDED MAN.

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO IT.

FAREWELL, MIYO.

OKAY.

I WASN'T ABLE TO SAY ANYTHING BACK TO HER.

LADY MIYO?

LET'S GO HOME.

I'M A DISGRACE. ALL I DO IS LOOK DOWN AT MY FEET. THAT'S NOT SUITABLE FOR A FIANCÉE OF HIS.

I WONDER IF YURIE IS LEERY OF ME NOW.

AND YET...

...I STILL FEAR YURIE AND LORD KUDO'S DISAPPOINT-MENT.

AND I KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE THAT I'M NOT THE BEST FIT FOR THIS.

I HATE
THIS.

I HATE
HOW
I'M LIKE
THIS.

I
TRULY
DESPISE
IT.

TO WHAT DO I OWE THIS PLEASURE?

ON THE CONTRARY, LORD KUDO, I AM HONORED TO HAVE YOU VISIT US TODAY.

LORD SAIMORI.

I MUST THANK YOU FOR RECEIVING ME ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE YOUR DAUGHTER, MIYO, MY OFFICIAL FIANCÉE.

AND, IN TIME, TAKE HER HAND IN MARRIAGE.

I SEE.

HMM.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY RELATIONSHIP ?

ACCORDINGLY, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD CLEARLY DELINEATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KUDO AND SAIMORI.

AND WHAT...

...DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

...AFTER CONSIDERING WHAT EACH PARTY INVOLVED STANDS TO GAIN OR LOSE.

MARRIAGES AMONG PEOPLE OF OUR STANDING TYPICALLY COME TO FRUITION...

YET I ADMIT I AM HESITANT TO OFFER YOUR FAMILY ANYTHING IN RETURN FOR THIS UNION.

DO YOU NOT UNDER-STAND?

BUT—

YOU WILL, ON ONE CONDITION.

DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT MY FAMILY WILL RECEIVE NO COMPENSATION FOR GIVING OUR DAUGHTER AWAY?

YOU GIVE MIYO AN APOLOGY. A GENUINE APOLOGY.

THEN I WILL GLADLY SEND YOU A GENEROUS SUM OF BETROTHAL MONEY.

GRIP ギリ

SNAP ギッ

THEIR HEIRESS, KAYA, IS NOT PARTICULARLY POWERFUL.

I CAN'T IMAGINE HER FULFILLING ANY IMPERIAL DUTY ASSIGNED TO HER.

THE SAIMORIS WILL ONLY CONTINUE TO WANE AS A GIFTED FAMILY.

...WILL NOT HELP THEM. THEY'RE IN SIMILAR DANGER.

EVEN MIXING WITH THE TATSUISHI FAMILY...

I WILL NOT FORCE YOU.

BUT I WILL CUT ALL TIES WITH YOU.

...THEN HE SHOULD BE HAPPY TO ACCEPT ANY-THING, MONEY INCLUDED.

IF SHINICHI SAIMORI IS INDEED TAKING THE FUTURE INTO CONSID-ERATION...

APOLO-GIZE...

...YOU SAY?

...I AM AWARE OF NEARLY ALL THAT YOU HAVE SUBJECTED MIYO TO.

THAT SAID, I WOULD LIKE YOU TO REMEMBER...

LET ME...

...THINK ABOUT IT.

DEAR —

VERY WELL.

BUT I WILL NOT WAIT LONG.

KOJI TRIED TO STAND UP FOR HER.

AND KUDO HASN'T EVEN KICKED HER OUT YET!

WELCOME HOME, MISS KAYA.

UGH. I DO NOT LIKE THIS ONE BIT!

WHY?!

BESIDES, YOU'RE ON *HER* SIDE, AREN'T YOU?!

KAYA, JUST CALM DOWN.

HMPH!

DON'T EVEN BOTHER TRYING TO SOOTHE ME WITH SWEET WORDS.

HE'S SUPPOSED TO SAY, "OF COURSE NOT, I'M ON YOUR SIDE!"

WHY ISN'T HE SAYING ANYTHING?!

HE'S SO INCONSIDER-ATE!

I'D FORGIVE HIM IMMEDIATELY IF HE JUST PATTED MY HEAD AND APPEASED ME!

PEEK

WHAT?

OH.

AH, A GUEST?

HE'S SO...

...BEAUTIFUL.

Chapter 10: Unshed Tears

WELCOME BACK.

I'M HOME.

HOOT

HOOT

I APOLOGIZE. NOTHING HAPPENED.

NO. WE WERE—

WHAT'S WRONG?

LADY MIYO!

I WILL BE RETIRING FOR THE NIGHT.

YOUR DINNER IS READY, LORD KUDO.

MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES, YOUNG MASTER.

I WAS WITH HER ALMOST THE ENTIRE TIME, BUT...

YES.

DID SOMETHING HAPPEN WHILE YOU WERE OUT?

I'VE BEEN SO WORRIED.

I COULD NOT BRING MYSELF TO RETURN TO MY HOME YET.

SHE WAS HOLED UP IN HER ROOM UNTIL YOU CAME HOME.

SO THAT'S WHY.

TALK ABOUT GETTING EVERYTHING BACKWARD.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS HAPPENED WHILE I WAS SPEAKING WITH THE SAIMORIS.

PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE I NEVER KNOW WHAT TO DO AT TIMES LIKE THIS...

...AND SO I DO NOTHING THAT THEY ALL CALL ME HEARTLESS.

...WHAT TO SAY TO HER. HOW TO SUPPORT HER.

BUT WHEN THIS HAPPENS, I JUST DON'T KNOW...

MURMUR

WHAT CAN I DO TO GIVE HER CONFIDENCE?

YEARS OF ABUSE HAVE DEPLETED HER SELF-WORTH.

PERHAPS THAT'S ALSO WHY SHE'S SO QUICK TO APOLOGIZE.

?

THE ANSWER IS OBVIOUS.

HEE HEE

WOMEN FIND CONFIDENCE IN BEING LOVED.

CHERISH HER, YOUNG MASTER...

...AND SHE WILL SURELY GROW MORE SURE OF HERSELF.

BUT...I CAN AT LEAST TELL HER MY THOUGHTS ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS IN THE FUTURE.

I'M NOT SURE IF WHAT I AM FEELING IS CALLED LOVE.

SHF...

IT'S ME.

MAY I?

BUT... DO YOU MIND?

I WOULD LIKE TO BE LEFT ALONE, IF JUST FOR A LITTLE.

MY APOLOGIES, LORD KUDO.

NO...I'M SORRY.

CAN YOU DO THAT?

I ONLY WANT YOU TO LISTEN.

BUT LET ME SAY ONE THING.

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO IT, THEN.

I SEE.

FSH

DON'T DWELL ON THEM TOO MUCH.

ALL THE WORRIES THAT PLAGUE YOU NOW...

...WILL ONE DAY FADE INTO THE PAST.

WHENEVER YOU'RE READY TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH ME...

...I WILL BE RIGHT HERE.

...OKAY.

I HAVE SEEN HER SIGNIFICANTLY LESS OVER THE PAST WEEK.

SKRCH

SKRCH

I CAN'T BELIEVE ...

...THIS HAS LASTED FOR A WEEK NOW.

ALL THE WHILE, THESE SUSPECT PAPER CREATIONS TAIL ME.

AND I HAVE YET TO RECEIVE AN ANSWER FROM THE SAIMORIS.

I SEE HER FOOD LAID OUT, BUT SHE DOES NOT EAT WITH ME.

SHE DOES NOT WELCOME ME HOME OR SEE ME OFF.

TAK

SOMEONE'S GOT A LONG FACE.

I KNOW WHO'S BEHIND IT.

BUT AS OF NOW, I HAVE NO DIRECT POINT OF CONTACT, NOR DO I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE AFTER.

I'M NOT SURE HOW TO DEAL WITH IT.

...

I KNOW, I KNOW.

YOU DON'T USUALLY... NO, YOU'VE *NEVER* KEPT A FIANCÉE FOR THIS LONG, RIGHT?

AND IT'S STILL NOT OFFICIAL YET?

HEH HEH

LIFE IS JUST FULL OF SURPRISES!

SHUT UP.

NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY WHEN MY CAPTAIN'S ALL DOOM AND GLOOM 'CAUSE OF A GIRL!

NO NEED TO BRAG ABOUT IT, SHEESH!

OOF

YOU'RE NOT GETTING HER.

A GIRL YOU ACTUALLY LIKE! I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HER AGAIN!

CAN'T BELIEVE SHE REALLY EXISTS!

OOH OOH

GODO.

YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING TOMORROW.

OF COURSE.

IMPERIAL CENTRAL STATION TOMORROW, AFTER NOON.

THEN TO YOUR HOUSE BY CAR.

I HOPE THIS GOES WELL.

SIGH

YOU ARE RIGHT TO.

AND DON'T FORGET MY REWARD!

THREE NIGHTS OF WHATEVER I WANT AT THE IZAKAYA!

YES, I KNOW.

I'M COUNTING ON YOU FOR THIS.

I'M SICK OF KAYA'S VOICE IN MY HEAD TELLING ME I'LL NEVER BE WORTH A THING.

SO I'M GOING TO THINK ABOUT LORD KUDO.

HE SHINES FAR TOO BRIGHTLY FOR ME TO BE ABLE TO STAY WITH HIM.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, I FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE AT HIS SIDE. I NEVER WANT TO LEAVE.

BUT IF I STAY WITH HIM, THEN THAT MEANS I NEED TO TELL HIM THE TRUTH.

AND IF I TELL HIM THE TRUTH...

HE'S SO BEAUTIFUL.

SO KIND.

SO POWERFUL.

BUT...

BUT I CAN'T PUT THIS OFF ANY LONGER.

I NEED TO GIVE HIM THE CORD AND TELL HIM EVERY-THING.

THE BRAIDED CORD I WAS MAKING FOR HIM IS ALREADY DONE.

NOW I'M JUST WASTING TIME USING THE LEFTOVER CORD TO MAKE ONE OF A DIFFERENT PATTERN.

LADY MIYO.

DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT?

YURIE?

...ONCE THAT HAPPENS...

...I MAY NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN.

...WHO KNOWS I'M HERE.

I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE BESIDES MY FAMILY...

YOU HAVE A GUEST.

MAY I BRING HER IN?

DON'T LET IT BE—

PLEASE...

...COME IN.

I KNOW THAT VOICE!

GASP

IT'S BEEN A VERY LONG TIME...

...MISS MIYO.

THERE WAS ONLY ONE PERSON...

SHF

...WHO WAS ALWAYS ON MY SIDE WHEN I WAS A CHILD.

MY HOUSE-MAID.

YOU'RE SO BIG NOW...

...MISS MIYO.

HANA!

H—

I HAVE CHILDREN TOO.

AND NOW I TEND THE FIELDS WITH MY HUSBAND.

I AM QUITE HAPPY.

O-OH!

CONGRAT-ULATIONS.

I GOT MARRIED.

I MUST TELL YOU.

SO THIS IS QUITE THE RELIEF. I'M HAPPY FOR HER.

HANA LOST HER JOB AFTER SHE WAS KICKED OUT OF THE SAIMORI HOUSEHOLD.

I HAD HOPED SHE HADN'T FALLEN ON HARD TIMES.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

HAVE YOU FOUND HAPPINESS?

...THAT I WAS NOT THERE FOR YOU DURING THE WORST OF IT.

I AM SO DEEPLY SORRY...

I HEARD WHAT HAPPENED AFTER I WAS FIRED.

SF

...UM...

I...

...I CAME ALL THIS WAY BECAUSE...

SQUEEZE

I COULDN'T BE THERE FOR YOU. WHAT COULD I DO FOR YOU AFTER ALL THIS TIME?

TO BE HONEST, I DIDN'T THINK I HAD THE RIGHT TO FACE YOU AGAIN.

BUT...

HANA...

AFTER ALL THE PAIN AND SUFFERING YOU WENT THROUGH...

...I WANTED TO SEE OUR VERY, VERY BELOVED LITTLE MISS...

...BEAMING WITH JOY AT LAST.

THAT'S WHY I CAME.

...I WANTED TO SEE YOU HAVE YOUR HAPPY ENDING, MISS MIYO.

I DIDN'T WANT HANA TO SEE ME LIKE THIS.

AFTER I'D LOST THE RIGHT TO THE TITLE OF "BELOVED LITTLE MISS."

AFTER I'D FALLEN SO FAR IN THE WORLD.

SHE WAS LIKE THE MOTHER I NEVER HAD. SHE GAVE ME SO MUCH WARMTH.

I NEVER WANTED TO MAKE HER SAD.

...I DON'T HAVE THE GIFT.

...HANA, I...

BUT...

PLIP

I DON'T EVEN HAVE SPIRIT-SIGHT.

AND THAT'S WHY...

...I'M NOT FIT TO BE HIS WIFE.

PLOP

I CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER.

PLOP

I'VE KNOWN THIS ALL ALONG.

BUT SAYING IT OUT LOUD...

...HURTS.

I HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE ONCE I TELL LORD KUDŌ.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE.

I WANT TO STAY HERE.

I HAVE NO MORE TIES TO THE SAIMORIS.

YET I STILL LEARNED YOU WERE HERE. DO YOU KNOW WHY?

I... CAN'T SAY.

HM?

OH, MISS MIYO.

DO YOU KNOW...

...HOW I FOUND YOU HERE?

MISS MIYO, YOU SHOULD KNOW.

I WAS STUNNED WHEN I FIRST RECEIVED THE LETTER.

IT WAS FROM SOMEONE OF SUCH HIGH STATUS, YOU SEE.

...IS A VERY GOOD MAN.

LORD KUDO...

LORD KUDO DID THIS...?

Chapter 11: The Truth

WHY?

HE SUMMONED YOU HERE, HANA?

FOR WHAT OTHER REASON...

...THAN BECAUSE HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT YOU, MISS MIYO?

IF HE KNOWS ABOUT HANA, THEN...

...THAT MEANS HE'S LOOKED INTO ME.

GASP

...WILL ONE DAY FADE INTO THE PAST.

ALL THE WORRIES THAT PLAGUE YOU NOW...

SQUEEZE

HANA...

...BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE THE GIFT...

...I DON'T HAVE ANY VALUE.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT...

I WAS CONVINCED THAT ONCE HE FOUND OUT THE TRUTH, HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY TOSS ME OUT.

I'VE BEEN SO SCARED OF TELLING LORD KUDO.

I DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE THE HAPPINESS I HAVE NOW.

BUT THE MAN I KNOW HIM TO BE IS...

LORD KUDO IS WAITING FOR YOU.

FIND YOUR COURAGE, MISS MIYO.

AND NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU...

...KNOW THAT I'LL BE THERE TO HELP THIS TIME.

I KNOW YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

!

THANK YOU.

HANA.

AHH.

I REMEMBER NOW.

I WILL...

...TELL HIM EVERYTHING.

THE FEEL OF HER HANDS IS FAMILIAR.

THEY'RE SO WARM.

TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP
LORD KUDO!
WHAM
STARE

SQUEEZE

F.W.P.

WHY THE RUCKUS?

WHAT?

...I'VE BEEN KEEPING FROM YOU.

LORD KUDO.

THERE'S SOME-THING...

I...

I—

...I DON'T...

...HAVE THE GIFT.

I ONLY ATTENDED ELEMEN-TARY SCHOOL.

I WORKED AS A SERVANT AT HOME EVER SINCE THEN.

BOTH OF MY PARENTS HAD THE GIFT.

BUT I...

...DON'T.

I AM NOT BEAUTIFUL EITHER.

I AM NOT CULTURED AT ALL.

NOTHING ABOUT ME SAYS I'M FROM A GOOD FAMILY.

I DIDN'T WANT...

THAT'S WHY I KNOW...

...I'M NOWHERE NEAR SUITED ENOUGH TO BE YOUR WIFE.

...TO BE...

...THROWN OUT.

IT'S BECAUSE OF DISGRACEFUL EMOTIONS THAT I...

...NEVER SAID ANYTHING.

IF YOU TELL ME TO LEAVE, THEN I WILL DO JUST THAT.

IF YOU TELL ME TO DIE, THEN I WILL DUTIFULLY DO SO.

SHF

YOU ARE WELCOME TO DISPOSE OF IT OR BURN IT IF YOU DON'T WANT IT.

I MADE THIS FOR YOU FROM A PLACE OF APOLOGY AND GRATITUDE.

I EAGERLY AWAIT YOUR JUDGMENT.

THAT IS EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO TELL YOU.

THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE FOR ME.

TONK

HOW LONG DO YOU INTEND TO STAY THAT WAY?

I CAN'T HAVE YOU LEAVE.

BECAUSE IT WON'T BE LONG NOW. I WANT TO FORMALLY MAKE YOU MY FIANCÉE.

L—

LO—

LORD KUDO—

...OF LIVING HERE WITH ME?

OR DO YOU NOT LIKE THE IDEA...

?

SHF...

BTHMP

BTHMP

BTHMP

MY HEART JUST FEELS LIKE IT'S GOING TO BURST!

THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL!

!

I...

...I WANT...

GRIP ギュッ

...TO STAY HERE WITH YOU.

IF YOU'LL LET ME.

I WANT YOU TO STAY HERE WITH ME.

THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING.

YOU.

IF ALL THE PAIN AND ANGUISH I WENT THROUGH IN THE PAST...

...WAS MEANT TO BRING ME TO THIS VERY MOMENT...

...THEN IT WILL HAVE ALL BEEN WORTH IT.

YES.

WILL YOU USE THIS TO TIE MY HAIR FOR ME, THEN?

SQUEEZE

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL PURPLE.

THERE.

ALL DONE.

THANK YOU.

I WILL TREASURE THIS GIFT...

...MIYO.

I—

I'M GLAD.

...I WOULD STILL BE LOCKED AWAY IN MY ROOM.

...HAD YOU NOT SAID WHAT YOU DID...

HAD YOU NOT COME TO SEE ME...

HANA.

THANK YOU SO, SO MUCH.

...AND TO HAVE SPOKEN WITH YOU AGAIN.

I'M SO HAPPY I GOT TO SEE YOU BEAMING LIKE THIS...

I'M HONORED TO HAVE BEEN SOME HELP.

SEEMS LIKE THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS.

NO.

DID ANYONE TAIL YOU?

THANKS, GODO.

WHOEVER THEY ARE, THEY'RE ONLY WATCHING YOU.

NOT A PROBLEM! IT'S WHAT WE AGREED TO, ANYWAY.

DON'T LOOK SO SAD TO SEE HER GO.

YOU CAN VISIT WHOMEVER YOU LIKE FROM NOW ON.

VRRR

AND I'VE STILL YET TO SEE MIYO AT ALL.

CRNKL

CRNKL

THAT IMPERTINENT LITTLE KUDO.

TCH.

CRMPT

LOST HIM AGAIN.

WITH HER LOOKS, SHE'S BARELY EVEN SUITED TO BE A SERVANT.

I MUST TELL YOU THIS.

MY INSOLENT SISTER IS STILL SITTING PRETTY IN LORD KUDO'S MANOR.

I WAS IN SUCH A BAD MOOD THAT DAY...

KOJI KEEPS STICKING UP FOR HER.

KIYOKA KUDO, MOST LIKELY.

...BUT THEN...

...I SAW THE MOST WONDERFUL MAN.

BUT WITH WHAT KAYA SAID IN MIND, HE LIKELY CAME TO COMPLAIN THAT MIYO IS INADEQUATE.

ON WHAT BUSINESS, I DO NOT KNOW.

I AM AWARE THAT HE VISITED THE SAIMORI HOUSEHOLD.

BUT THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME.

TCH

I SEE HOW THINGS ARE GROWING SOUR IN THE SAIMORI HOUSE.

HE LIKELY ASKED FOR COMPENSATION FOR THE INCONVENIENCE.

THEY SHOULD HAVE JUST GIVEN MIYO TO US TO BEGIN WITH.

AND THEN EVERYTHING WILL BE WHERE IT SHOULD BE.

WHEN KUDO KICKS HER OUT, WE'LL TAKE HER IN.

AS WIFE TO THE TATSUISHI FAMILY.

キュッ、
TIGHTEN

Chapter 12: A Meal in Thanks

THIS IS ALL FOR ME?

IT'S THANKS FOR THE CORD.

DON'T FEEL BAD. TAKE THEM.

AND THERE'S SO MANY. I CAN'T TAKE THEM.

BUT THEY'RE ALL SO NICE.

HMPH

THESE KIMONOS WERE HAND-PICKED BY LORD KUDO HIMSELF.

HE THOUGHT THEY WOULD SUIT YOU.

HE SELECTED THIS BOLT IN PARTICULAR RIGHT AWAY.

THIS ONE...

...LOOKS LIKE MY MOTHER'S OLD KIMONO.

OF COURSE.

...THANK YOU.

LORD KUDO...

PERHAPS I LOOK A LITTLE LIKE MY MOTHER NOW.

HEE HEE

I NEED TO GET READY FOR DINNER.

BOY, I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS!

CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'S TREATING ME TO DINNER AS THANKS!

SO DILIGENT! SHE'S GONNA BE A GREAT WIFE.

CUTE LITTLE MIYO.

YOU WILL NOT CALL HER THAT.

EVEN THOUGH I ALREADY TREATED YOU PLENTY AT THE IZAKAYA.

I WAS SHOCKED WHEN MIYO SAID SHE WANTED TO REPAY GODO.

OH NO! MY FIEND OF A BOSS IS GONNA KILL ME!

OF COURSE NOT. I WAS SIMPLY OVERWHELMED WITH RAGE FOR A MOMENT.

WHOA, JEALOUS ALREADY?

YOU *ARE* JEALOUS!

BY THE WAY, DID WE LOSE THE TAIL YET?

THAT THING REALLY DOES FOLLOW YOU EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME, EVERY DAY.

AFTER ALL...

...I NEVER THOUGHT SHE WOULD WANT TO SEE SOMEONE ELSE OF HER OWN WILL.

IT'S A WELCOME CHANGE.

NO NEED TO WORRY.

THIS SORT OF THING IS NOT A THREAT TO ME. I HAVE IT UNDER CONTROL.

SIIIGH

STILL, IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE POWERFUL GIFTS OCCUR IN PEOPLE AT ALL ANYMORE.

THERE ARE MUCH FEWER GROTESQUERIES ANYWAY. IT WAS INEVITABLE.

OF COURSE.

...TECHNOLOGY THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE HAS EVOLVED RAPIDLY.

WITH THE INFLUX OF WESTERN CULTURE...

GRO-TESQUE-RIES...

...ARE MIRAGES BORN FROM PEOPLE'S IMAGINATIONS, RIGHT?

THEY'RE NOT ALWAYS FALSE, THOUGH.

THE GIFTED ARE NO LONGER NEEDED TO STAMP THEM OUT, SO THEIR NUMBERS DWINDLE AS WELL.

MORE AND MORE PEOPLE DENY THE EXISTENCE OF GROTES-QUERIES.

AS A RESULT, THEY HAVE VANISHED RAPIDLY.

AS SCIENCE COMES TO EXPLAIN THESE PHENOMENA, THE PEOPLE AREN'T AS AFRAID.

AND THE GROTES-QUERIES LOSE THEIR POWER.

WHEN AN ENTIRE GROUP OF PEOPLE FEAR THE SAME IDEA OF A MONSTER...

...IT GAINS POWER AND APPEARS IN THE REAL WORLD. THAT IS A GROTESQUE-RIE.

HUMANS WITNESS A MYSTERIOUS PHENOMENON AND BELIEVE IT TO BE A MONSTER'S WORK.

NOT EVEN I WOULD BE CLASSIFIED AMONG THE BEST OF THE GIFTED OF YORE.

AS A NATURAL RESULT ...

...THE GIFTED, TOO, GROW WEAKER.

HEY! WE'RE HERE!

VRRRM

HEH HEH HEH

SKRRRR

ARE YOU NOW?

I SUPPOSE THE TIME HAS COME TO FINALLY SILENCE YOU.

KCHAK

GAAAAAH!

PLEASE, NO!

SHOVE

GUH!

WE'RE HERE. GET OUT.

YOU'RE SO VIOLENT. SHEESH!

I'M GONNA TELL MIYO.

HER COMPLEXION IS MUCH BETTER. HER CHEEKS ARE ROSY.

HER SHIMMERING BLACK HAIR IS PROPERLY COMBED.

HER WRISTS NO LONGER HINT AT POOR HEALTH AS THEY ONCE DID.

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

WELCOME HOME, LORD KUDO.

AND WELCOME, MISTER GODO.

LORD KUDO?

NOTHING. THE KIMONO...

...IT'S BEAUTIFUL. IT SUITS YOU WELL.

BLUSHHH

OOPS

OH!

I'M SO SORRY, MISTER GODO!

YOU'RE STILL HERE? YOU CAN LEAVE.

HA HA HA HA HA

I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT.

UM...

THANK YOU, TRULY, LORD KUDO.

I LOVE THIS KIMONO VERY MUCH.

PLEASE, COME IN.

WHOA!

THIS IS GREAT!

YOU STILL LIVE WITH YOUR PARENTS. DON'T YOU EAT WELL EVERY DAY?

EAT AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE.

IS THAT SO?

AT HOME, WE HAVE A COOK. BUT A COOK'S MEALS...

...HAVE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT APPEAL FROM SIMPLE, HONEST HOME COOKING AND IZAKAYA FOOD!

NO, YOU DON'T GET IT, CAPTAIN!

LET ME POUR THIS FOR YOU, MISTER GODO.

OH THANK YOU!

I WANT TO TELL YOU...

...THAT I TRULY APPRECIATE YOU BRINGING HANA TO ME THE OTHER DAY.

DON'T MENTION IT!

I JUST DROVE THE CAR!

STILL, I WAS ABLE TO TALK THINGS OUT CALMLY WITH BOTH HANA AND LORD KUDO THAT DAY.

AND IT'S THANKS TO YOU.

THAT'S ALL I GET?!

BE NICER!!

THANKS. YOU CAN LEAVE.

I'VE NEVER HAD ANYONE SAY THAT TO ME BEFORE!

A-AWWW, I'M SO HAPPY!

AHEM.

BREAK UP WITH MY AWFUL BOSS AND MARRY ME INSTEAD!

UM...

MIYO!

.....

.....

.....

UM, I APPRECIATE THE OFFER, MISTER GODO.

YOU JUST NEVER SAY ANYTHING NICE TO ME!

KLATTER

DAMMIT, GODO...

I-I'M JOKING!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KILL ME!

AH!

O-OF COURSE! I CROSSED A LINE.

BUT I PREFER LORD KUDO.

I'M SORRY.

...THAT MIYO WOULD TAKE ANYONE SO LONG AS THEY GAVE HER A HOME.

I WAS WRONG.

IT APPEARS THIS WHOLE TIME I'VE BEEN AFRAID...

BUT I PREFER LORD KUDO...

BUT NOW SHE'S NOT ONLY ACCEPTED THE KIMONOS I GAVE HER, SHE'S WEARING ONE.

SHE'S COME TO TRUST ME.

PERHAPS THAT WAS THE CASE IN THE BEGINNING.

YEAH! SOME GENERALS START SHAKING WHEN THEY HEAR THE CAPTAIN'S NAME.

YOU GOTTA WONDER WHAT THEY DID.

NOT THAT I WANT TO KNOW, THOUGH.

OH MY. SO EVEN THE HIGHER-RANKING OFFICERS ...?

GODO ...

THERE'S ME, HIS IMMEDIATE SUPERIORS, AND MAJOR GENERAL OKAITO. THAT'S IT.

NOT MANY CAN SPEAK THEIR MIND TO HIM!

CAPTAIN LOOKS LIKE A DEMON WHEN HE GETS ALL ANGRY!

BUT I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I?

EEEK!

GODO!!

LOOOOM

YOU REALLY LIKE RUNNING YOUR MOUTH, DON'T YOU?

GAH! THERE IT IS!

THAT GODO.

PRATTLING AWAY TO HIS HEART'S CONTENT BEFORE RUNNING OFF...

I'LL WORK HIM HARD TOMOR-ROW.

IT'S...

...TOO QUIET.

ZZT...

...ST...

...OP...

RATTLE

!!

I THOUGHT I SENSED THE SLIGHTEST USE OF THE GIFT.

MIYO, WAKE UP!

SQUEEZE

...NO...

... PLEASE ...

... STOP ...

PL...

... PLEASE ...

MIYO!

LORD ...

... KUDO?

HANG IN THERE. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WERE YOU HAVING A NIGHT-MARE?

A NIGHT-MARE...

OH.

UM...

YOU WERE MUTTERING IN YOUR SLEEP.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING ?

DRIP

AH...

WH!

NGH!

HUG

I DON'T MIND.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN A TERRIBLE DREAM.

CRY UNTIL YOU FEEL BETTER.

L-LORD...

...KUDO?

ISN'T THAT WHAT A HUSBAND AND WIFE DO FOR ONE ANOTHER?

I TOLD YOU BEFORE.

I WANT US TO BE ABLE TO BE HONEST WITH EACH OTHER.

TELL ME HOW YOU FEEL, AND COME TO ME WHEN YOU WANT.

YOU SHOULD RELY ON ME MORE.

LEAN ON ME ALL YOU NEED.

BUT...

...I WANT TO RELEASE HER FROM THIS PAIN ALREADY.

THE SCARS ON HER HEART MUST RUN MUCH DEEPER THAN I IMAGINED.

THEY WILL NOT EASILY FADE.

AND WHEN YOUR TEARS RUN DRY, I WANT YOU TO SMILE.

SO CRY. CRY ALL YOU NEED.

...EVERY NIGHT.

...DREAMS...

...I'VE HAD...

...I CAME HERE...

EVER SINCE...

I TELL THEM TO STOP.

TO GIVE THEM BACK. BUT THEY JUST...

...LAUGH.

...RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES.

I SEE MY MOTHER'S HEIR-LOOMS...

...BURNED TO ASHES...

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN SO HARD.

...I WISH I COULD STAY WITH YOU LIKE THIS FOR-EVER.

IS THAT OKAY?

LORD KUDO, TO BE HONEST...

SOMETHING VERY SIMILAR PROBABLY HAPPENED IN REALITY.

UNTIL DEATH PARTS US.

OF COURSE.

STAY HERE.

EVEN STILL.

TO ME, THOUGH, YOU ARE NEITHER USELESS NOR POWERLESS.

AS I RECALL, I TOLD YOU VERY RECENTLY THAT I CAN'T HAVE YOU LEAVE ME.

BUT I'M USELESS AND HAVE NO GIFT. I'M POWERLESS.

EVEN STILL?

I STILL...

...AND SERVE YOU AS BEST I CAN.

GRIP

BUT...

...IF POSSIBLE, I WANT TO STAY WITH YOU...

...DON'T THINK I'M THE SORT OF PERSON WHO DESERVES TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU.

AND SO...I'LL WORK HARDER.

SO THAT I CAN BE OF USE TO YOU...

...FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

...MUSTERING EVERYTHING WITHIN HER TO GIVE ME SUCH AN OPTIMISTIC PROMISE.

MIYO HAS SPENT SO LONG SHRINKING HERSELF DOWN.

AND NOW THIS IS HER, IN THIS MOMENT...

PHEW

DO JUST THAT.

YES, PLEASE.

IF A GIFT IS AT THE ROOT OF HER NIGHTMARES ...

BUT WHAT WAS THE GIFTED ENERGY I SENSED?

...THEN I CAN ONLY IMAGINE IT HAS COME FROM...

...HER MOTHER'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY, THE USUBAS.

THIS IS QUITE SUDDEN, LORD TATSUISHI.

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

Chapter 13: Envy and Impatience

KAYA.

I IMAGINE YOU'RE VERY CURIOUS...

I HAVE JUST WITNESSED SOMETHING I FOUND VERY HARD TO BELIEVE.

...ABOUT HOW YOUR SISTER MIYO IS DOING RIGHT NOW.

DP
DP
DP

GO! FOLLOW MY SISTER!

WSH...

BANG

KAYA.

YOU MUST NEVER, EVER, BE LIKE *THAT THING.*

SHE IS POWERLESS.

THAT IS *NOT* A SAIMORI.

MOTHER.

WHY IS MY SISTER ALWAYS—

YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO MAKE EVEN THE SLIGHTEST MISTAKE!

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, KAYA?!

OH

DENG

YOU MUST NEVER BE LIKE *THAT!*

I MUST BE BETTER THAN HER.

I AM ABOVE MY HALF SISTER.

WHATEVER SHE HAS, I MUST HAVE FOR MYSELF.

NO.

NO!

THAT CAN'T...

THAT CAN'T BE HER!

GASP

THAT'S...

...THE GORGEOUS MAN I PASSED IN THE MANOR.

THAT WAS KIYOKA KUDO?!

...A PERFECTLY HAPPY COUPLE.

BUT WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

THEY LOOK...

...ALMOST LIKE...

WHY?!

WHY...?

FZT

I'M PRETTIER THAN HER.

SMARTER THAN HER.

WHY SHOULD I SETTLE FOR BEING THE LADY OF A DECLINING FAMILY?

GRIP

THIS IS NOT RIGHT.

NO MATTER HOW SHE'S DRESSED UP HER APPEARANCE, SHE'S HOLLOW INSIDE.

NOTHING ABOUT THIS IS RIGHT.

KAYA, YOU MUST NEVER, EVER, BE LIKE *THAT THING.*

I BELIEVE I AM MORE SUITED TO MARRY INTO THE KUDO FAMILY.

FATHER!

SWAP ME WITH MIYO, PLEASE!

WHAT IS THIS ALL OF A SUDDEN?

NO.

IT DOES NOT MATTER.

FORGET ABOUT MIYO.

WHY?!

FATHER!

I SEE YOU HAVE TIME ON YOUR HANDS, KAYA.

WHY DON'T YOU GO AND SEE KOJI?

I WILL DO NO SUCH THING.

I AM MUCH MORE SUITED FOR THE KUDO FAMILY!

THIS HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

HE ALWAYS DOES WHAT I SAY.

KAYA?

SHNK...

KOJI?

OH,
KOJI.

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO MARRY MIYO?

WHAT?

I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

...IF YOU GOT TO MARRY HER?

WOULDN'T YOU BE HAPPY...

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE IF WE COULD SWAP.

IT'S CLEAR THAT I AM A BETTER FIT FOR LORD KUDO.

YOU LIKE MIYO MUCH MORE THAN YOU LIKE ME, DON'T YOU?

BUT WHY?

CUT THE NONSENSE, KAYA.

I THINK THAT'S BETTER FOR ALL OF US.

YOU'LL HELP ME, WON'T YOU?

YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING WITHOUT IT.

...

DID YOU GET YOUR FATHER'S PERMISSION?

THAT'S NOT THE ISSUE HERE.

KAYA!

I CAN'T BELIEVE *YOU'RE* BEING SO CRUEL TO ME TOO!

I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE!

BOTH MY FATHER AND KOJI ARE SO MEAN.

BUT I KNOW.

I KNOW LORD TATSUISHI WILL HELP ME.

OH, I HOPE SO.

THE YOUNG MASTER WILL BE DELIGHTED.

I DECIDED TO BRING HIM A LITTLE MEAL TO HOPEFULLY GIVE HIM SOME ENERGY, BUT...

I'VE HEARD HE WILL SKIP A MEAL IF HE'S VERY BUSY.

HE MUST BE EX-HAUSTED.

LORD KUDO SLEPT IN HIS OFFICE LAST NIGHT.

MY NAME IS MIYO SAIMORI, FIANCÉE TO KIYOKA KUDO. HE WORKS HERE.

I...

...I BROUGHT HIM SOME FOOD, SO...

PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME AND BUSINESS.

HELLO.

LET ME SPEAK WITH HIM.

Y-YES, MY LADY.

GAWK

FIANCÉE?!

WHY ARE YOU HERE? IS SOME-THING THE MATTER?

MIYO?

YURIE?

I DIDN'T WANT TO BOTHER YOU.

BUT...

HELLO, LORD KUDO.

OH. I SEE.

I...

...APPRE-CIATE IT.

SO I BROUGHT YOU A LITTLE SOME-THING.

...I WAS WORRIED YOU MIGHT BE SKIPPING MEALS.

I KNOW WE CAME TO SEE YOU.

BUT WE WON'T KEEP YOU ANY LONGER.

NO, IT WASN'T FAR.

AND I STILL HAVE PEP IN MY STEP.

YOU WALKED HERE, DIDN'T YOU?

DID YOU REST ALONG THE WAY?

HE'S EMBARRASSED.

?

COMING.

CAPTAIN!

YOU HAVE YOUR AMULET ON YOU, RIGHT?

YES, RIGHT HERE.

THANKS. TAKE CARE GETTING HOME, BOTH OF YOU.

OKAY.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

SORRY FOR TAKING YOU AWAY FROM YOUR WORK.

I HOPE THE REST OF THE DAY GOES WELL.

THEN THAT'S GOOD.

I WANT TO SEE YOU BACK, BUT I CAN'T.

MIYO.

PAT

PAT

ぽん

ぽん

HEE HEE. THAT BOY.

...

WHEN I CHANGED MY PURSE TO MATCH MY KIMONO...

...I FORGOT TO PUT IT IN MY NEW ONE.

...I THINK I LEFT THE AMULET AT HOME.

I JUST TOLD HIM I HAD IT, BUT...

OH DEAR.

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

HM?

THIS MEANS I LIED TO HIM.

I REALLY AM USELESS, AREN'T I?

AND I PROMISED I WOULD KEEP IT ON ME, TOO.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT SORT OF EFFECT THE AMULET HAS.

WE SHOULD.

IN THAT CASE, LADY MIYO...

...WE SHOULD GO HOME STRAIGHT-AWAY.

IT MUST BE SIGNIFI-CANT.

BUT LORD KUDO WAS SO WORRIED AS TO WHETHER OR NOT I HAD IT ON ME.

THAT MAKES ME UNEASY.

...IT FEELS LIKE I LACK HIS PROTECTION.

AND WITHOUT IT...

GRAB

SKREEEE

?!

YES.

WE'RE ALMOST THERE.

VRRRRRM

LADY MIYO!

WH-WHAT'S—

MMF!

SLAM

WHAT'S HAPPENING ?!

I'M SCARED!

LORD KUDO!!

WHAT'S WRONG, YURIE?

I THOUGHT YOU WENT HOME.

YOUNG MASTER!

WHAT HAPPENED?

LADY MIYO WAS—

SHE WAS—

SHE WAS KIDNAPPED!

I THOUGHT SHE HAD HER CHARM ON HER.

TO BE HONEST...

...SHE REALIZED SHE DIDN'T HAVE IT AFTER WE LEFT.

NO ONE. WE WERE GOING STRAIGHT HOME.

DID YOU SEE ANYONE BEFORE SHE WAS KIDNAPPED?

A SAIMORI? OR A TATSUISHI, PERHAPS?

THAT CHARM CONCEALS HER PRESENCE FROM OTHERS' SPELLS.

GRIT

IF ONLY I'D CHECKED HER THINGS BEFORE WE LEFT.

THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED!

I AM CAPABLE OF MARCHING INTO ENEMY TERRITORY AND TAKING IT OVER ALL ON MY OWN.

BUT WITHOUT SOLID PROOF, I WILL BE AT A DISADVANTAGE.

WHOEVER IT WAS MUST BE THE ONE SENDING FAMILIARS AFTER ME EVERY DAY.

IT MUST BE TATSUISHI.

GO ON.

WHO IS IT?

CAPTAIN? SOMEONE'S HERE TO SEE YOU.

KNOCK

KNOCK

TP

KOJI TATSUISHI.

BUT...

...PLEASE.

GRIP

I KNOW IT'S NOT RIGHT FOR ME TO ASK THIS OF YOU.

I CAN'T SAVE MIYO ALONE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE *YOU'RE* BEING SO CRUEL TO ME TOO!

I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE!

KAYA!

...SHE'S TALKING TO FATHER.

SO MIYO HAS TO AGREE?

KAYA WAS ACTING STRANGE.

AND WHEN I FOLLOWED HER...

AND I BELIEVE SHE WILL GIVE IN IF YOU TELL HER TO.

YES. KUDO WILL HAVE TO LISTEN IF SHE SAYS IT OF HER OWN FREE WILL.

!

WONDER-FUL! WE CAN SWAP FIANCÉS NOW!

OF COURSE.

SO YOU'LL BRING HER TO ME, RIGHT?

WHAM

YOU CAN'T DO THIS!

WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU THINKING?!

WEREN'T YOU LISTENING?

SO I WENT TO YOURS.

MY FATHER WASN'T GOING TO ALLOW IT.

MIYO AND I ARE GOING TO SWAP.

I THOUGHT I ALREADY TOLD YOU.

BUT YOU ALWAYS USED TO SCOLD ME FOR MEDDLING IN THEIR AFFAIRS!

WHENEVER I TRIED TO HELP MIYO...

...YOU WOULD STOP ME.

WE SHALL DO WHAT WE MUST TO GET THE USUBAS' BLOOD.

IT WAS BEST FOR US TO HAVE HER ISOLATED.

HAD THE SAIMORIS REALIZED HER WORTH, THEY WOULD HAVE CLOSED RANKS AROUND HER.

DO YOU SEE NOW, KOJI?

BACK THEN WE RAN THE RISK OF THE SAIMORIS DISCOVERING MIYO'S WORTH IF WE WERE TOO BOLD IN PROTECTING HER.

SIGH

IF THEY DIDN'T ALL BUT THROW HER OUT, WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO COLLECT HER WITHOUT A FUSS.

...THE HELL?

WHAT...

NO REASONABLE HUMAN BEING WOULD EVER LET SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPEN.

NO WAY MY FATHER DIDN'T KNOW THAT MIYO WAS SO BEATEN DOWN AND SUFFERING SO DEEPLY...

...THAT SHE COULDN'T EVEN SMILE.

WE JUST SAT BACK AND WATCHED, ALL SO WE COULD "COLLECT" HER?

HAVE I BEEN FOLLOWING ORDERS FROM A DEMON?!

GRIT

I WON'T LET YOU DO THIS!

CRAK

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO, KOJI.

STOP THIS AT ONCE.

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU!

SHUT

10

9

VERY WELL. I LEAVE MY SISTER IN YOUR HANDS.

GO HOME, KAYA.

I WILL PAY YOU A VISIT ONCE I CLEAN UP HERE.

MIYO ISN'T YOURS TO PLAY WITH!

FWOOM

YOU ONCE FOUGHT SO HARD TO LEVITATE A SINGLE CHAIR.

NOW LOOK AT THIS. WHAT A SURPRISE.

SWF...

FREEZE

FWSH

WHY?!

TONK

SLAM

THWP!

DAMN... IT...

YOU FOOL.

YOU HAVE SCARCELY ANY TRAINING IN YOUR GIFT. YOU ARE NO MATCH FOR ME.

SERVANTS?

LOCK HIM UP.

I WENT ON AND ON ABOUT PROTECTING MIYO.

NOW LOOK AT ME!

MIYO MUST HAVE ALREADY BEEN CAPTURED AND TAKEN TO THE SAIMORI MANOR BY NOW.

I COULDN'T STOP FATHER ALONE.

NO!

...KIND, KOJI.

YOU'RE SO...

I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO NON-COMMITTAL.

THAT'S WHERE I WENT WRONG IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I WANTED TO PROTECT MIYO.

I SHOULD HAVE PUT THE EFFORT IN.

I SHOULD'VE MADE MY CHOICE EARLIER.

I'M INDECISIVE. A COWARD. WEAK.

ALL THIS TIME I'VE DONE NOTHING, DESPITE THINGS REACHING THIS POINT.

I'M SUCH...

...AN IDIOT.

CREAK

WHP

DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE GIVING UP?

KAZUSHI!

NGH

NO.

I'M GOING TO SAVE MIYO.

THWP

HEH

KSHHH

MY BINDS!

WHERE DID YOU LEARN HOW TO DO—

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD TIME TO ASK ME SILLY QUESTIONS.

DON'T YOU HAVE SOMEWHERE TO BE?

DASH

WE'RE ALMOST THERE.

YOUR PANIC WILL NOT CHANGE ANYTHING, KOJI TATSUISHI.

GASP

YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO YOUR FIANCÉE RIGHT NOW.

YOU SURE ARE CALM.

IS THIS GUY...

...EVEN WORRIED ABOUT MIYO?

IF HE EVER ABANDONS HER...

TRUE, KIYOKA KUDO IS PERFECT.

HE HAS NO FLAWS. NONE VISIBLE, AT LEAST.

I'M NOTHING COMPARED TO HIM. NOT AS A MAN, NOT AS A GIFT USER.

NO MATTER WHAT I DO, I'LL NEVER CATCH UP TO HIM.

DOES HE HAVE ANY IDEA HOW DEEP HER SADNESS RUNS?

HER LONELI-NESS?

HER SCARS?

BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW IF IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO LEAVE MIYO IN HIS CARE.

GRIP

DOES HE HAVE AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE IN GOING TO SAVE HER?

I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT...

...WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST, MOST EFFECTIVE WAY...

...TO BRING MIYO PEACE.

...I'LL KILL HER.

AND THEN MYSELF.

I KNOW THIS IS SELFISH.

BUT I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE.

SO WHEN THE TIME COMES...

WE'RE HERE.

SKRRRR

SAI-MORI

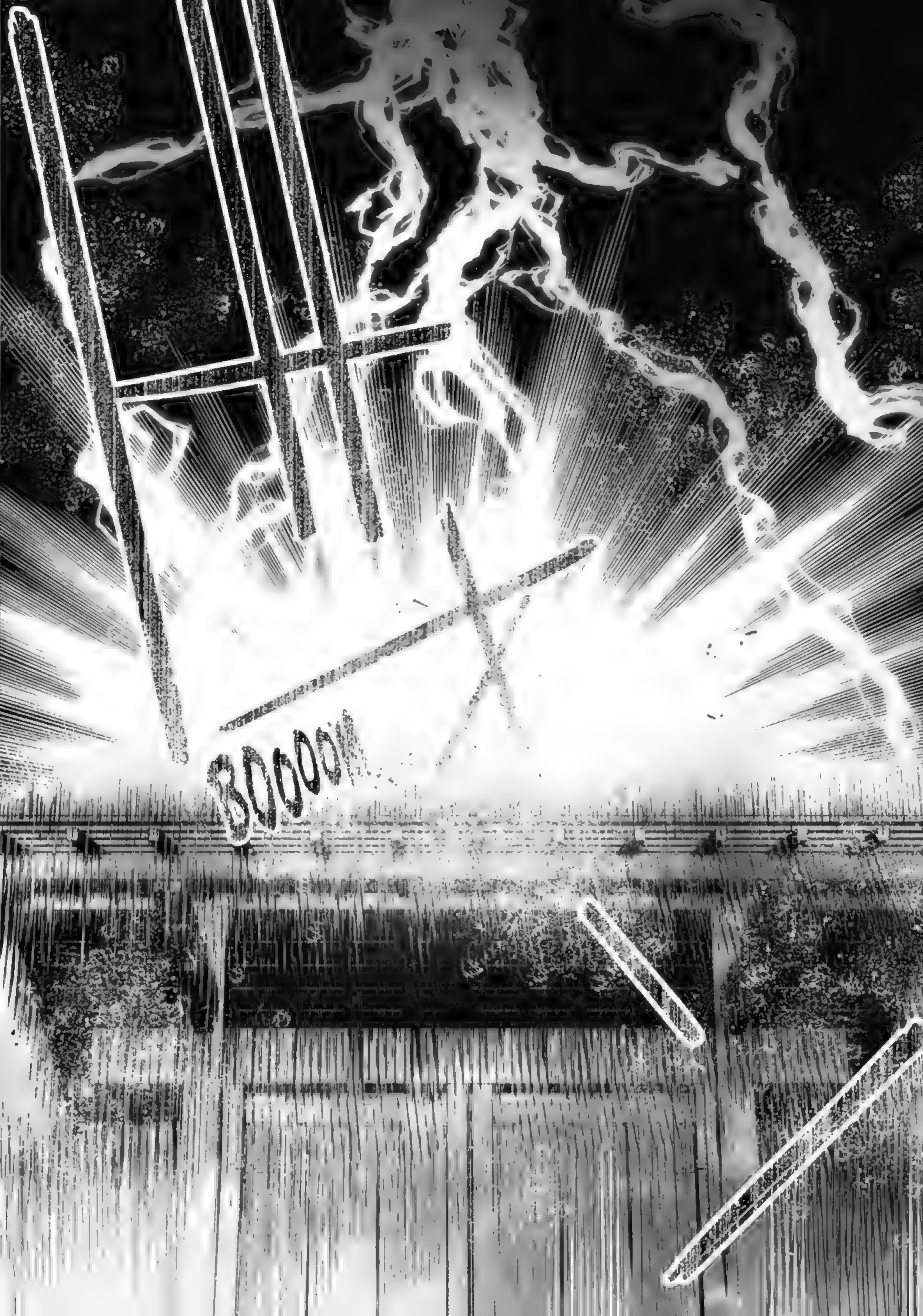
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

SLAM

I DOUBT THEY'LL ANSWER IF YOU KNOCK ON THE DOOR LIKE—

SHF

NO NEED TO WORRY.


BOOOM

KCHIK

KRRRAK

KROOM

U-UH.

OKAY.

ZZT

LET'S GO.

THIS GUY...

KZZIT

...IS FURIOUS.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.
HE WAS NEVER A LAVISH SPENDER TO BEGIN WITH.
THIS PARASOL MUST HAVE BEEN EXPENSIVE
LORD KUDO IS SPENDING QUITE A LOT OF MONEY ON ME...

To read a brand-new
short story by Akumi Agitogi,
the author of *My Happy Marriage*,
please turn to page 175 of this book,
where you'll find the story presented
in left-to-right reading order.

AW, I'M JEALOUS!
LET ME HAVE A BITE!
BLISS
MUNCH
DID MIYO MAKE THIS FOR YOU?

"Yes...?"

"...A woman like a wildflower."

A wildflower? He remembered wondering if Kiyoka meant someone resilient, like a weed, and concluding that his captain had strange tastes.

As he sat here today and looked at Miyo, it finally clicked.

She wasn't a showy hothouse flower—she was an adorable wildflower blooming on the side of the road.

Once the meal was over and Godo was getting ready to head home, Kiyoka stopped him.

"Godo."

"What?"

"...Are you satisfied?"

Godo turned back to look at Kiyoka, his eyes meeting a gaze that could see through all.

They had known each other for a very long time. The expression Godo found there told him that his perfect boss had been aware of everything going through his mind.

"Yeah! You bet I am!"

His worries were entirely unfounded, and he hadn't needed to mind any of Kiyoka's business after all.

Still, he was happy he came.

I wish...that one day I will find my soulmate.

The night breeze cooled his skin, warmed by all the alcohol.

In a great mood, his body and mind both thoroughly sated, Godo grinned.

"I've been so worried about Hana. Even though the servants growing up would call me...the eldest daughter of my family, I had no power to help or protect her. She was kicked out of the Saimori household and lost her job, and I didn't know how I'd forgive myself if it turned out she fell on hard times because of that."

Godo was silent.

"I was happy, from the bottom of my heart, to have seen her again. I was so relieved to see that she's living a happy life. And I was truly glad that she still remembered me. Just so glad..."

Miyo trailed off, her head low. Godo did not know what to say to her.

Maybe he had asked a careless question. A sudden sense of unease came over him. His suspicions had been so strong at first, but they were entirely gone now.

I was wrong to doubt her.

A terrible guilt washed over him, and he quickly changed the subject.

Afterward, he told Miyo what Kiyoka was like at work. She seemed delighted to listen to stories about him; she no longer looked sad or lonely.

He could tell she was really very happy now. In that case, everything was all right.

Oh right...

Godo recalled that he had once asked Kiyoka what sort of woman he was even hoping to marry, considering his general imperviousness to feminine advances.

"Why do you want to know this?"

"C'mon, why not? I'll tell you what kind of girls I'm into!"

"I am not interested in hearing that! But...very well. If I had to, I'd say..."

I'm relieved that my worries were for nothing, is what he wanted to say, but could not.

If Miyo's acting, then it's incredible *acting. It's probably genuine, though.*

If there were a person capable of acting that well, he could truly trust no one.

Godo collected himself, attempted not to look at his boss and the smile he was barely suppressing, and directed a question to Miyo.

"Can I ask you something, Miyo?"

"Um, sure."

"So, that Hana lady. Who is she to you?"

"What?"

Godo stared hard at her, making sure to watch every single one of her movements as her eyes rounded in surprise at the unexpected question.

Something had just occurred to him. When Kiyoka originally asked him for the favor, Godo had made sure not to press him about the particulars of the situation. But now he had a feeling that Miyo had direct ties to this Hana woman.

"Hana is..." Miyo slowly parted her lips to speak, as though retracing her steps through her memory. "Like a mother to me."

"Did she raise you?"

"In a sense. And that is why I truly cannot thank you or Lord Kudo enough for what you did."

There was a sadness to her smile, and it made Godo's heart hurt.

All Godo had done was just one little thing to help out, yet it seemed as though the act had been of incalculable importance to Miyo.

He couldn't leave until he had made sure Miyo wasn't like that. This was all for his stick-in-the-mud, romantically inexperienced superior officer.

Internally, he cringed at himself for perhaps being a little too worried about his captain as he turned to Miyo with a joke.

"Miyo, I'm so happy!" he exclaimed playfully. "I've never had anyone say that to me before! Break up with my awful boss and marry me instead!"

A woman with ulterior motives would either start thinking of Godo as a backup plan if Kiyoka ever let them go, or she would avoid acknowledging the statement at all so as not to rouse any suspicion from Kiyoka.

Not bad, if I do say so myself.

Yet Godo found himself deeply regretting the way he'd blurted something like that out.

The silent murderous aura wafting from his captain terrified him, but that was not what struck him the hardest.

"I appreciate the offer," Miyo replied. "But I prefer Lord Kudo... I'm sorry."

Her speech was polite but a bit clumsy, unlike that of a typical noble girl. Despite that, she appeared to be really and truly apologetic.

Her response was not at all what Godo had anticipated.

I-I was joking! I thought it was obvious that I was!

He had no idea how he was supposed to respond to her honesty. Here he was, doubting her for no good reason and trying to trick her into admitting her true intentions. He felt like an idiot.

That, and he spotted the quiet delight on Kiyoka's face when she said, *I prefer Lord Kudo.* It gave Godo the chills. He very much wanted to get out of there.

that Miyo could not hear: "See, Captain? I knew you could pull it off!"

And he was met with a rather forceful punch.

At the same time, however, Godo had a few suspicions on his mind.

Is this Miyo...exactly what she appears to be?

The Saimori clan that she belonged to was blessed with very few Gifted members as of late, leading to its steady decline as it was no longer capable of carrying out imperial orders. Soon Saimori would be an illustrious house in name only. It would be unwise to immediately trust a bride who was coming from a family like that.

Perhaps the Saimoris were after the Kudo assets, or perhaps they were trying to reclaim the glory of their family name through ties to the Kudo clan.

Godo doubted that Kiyoka would be tricked by someone so obviously suspicious, but the possibility was still there.

Captain's human too. He very well could have fallen in love at first sight and gone right under her sway.

Because of these doubts, Godo agreed to come for dinner, knowing it would be a perfect opportunity to form his own judgment about this Miyo.

Food and drink were served promptly.

"I want to thank you for bringing Hana to me the other day," Miyo said to him politely. And as he watched her, he felt like a cheap villain brought in to get between her and Kiyoka.

No, c'mon. Don't let her manipulate your emotions, Yoshito.

Some women could wear multiple faces and masks and switch them around with ease, and that made them more terrifying than nature's evilest spirits.

Godo eyed the scene taking place in front of him in the Kudo household entry.

"...It's beautiful. It suits you well."

Not even he, Kiyoka's aide, could ever have imagined those words coming out of the mouth of *this* man.

It was a week ago that Kiyoka had asked Godo to take a woman named Hana to and from the station. He'd been summoned here as thanks for doing just that.

Well, I did know Captain would end up getting married one day!

He was from a good family, and he needed to pass on his Gift, so declining to marry wouldn't be an option. Godo had honestly thought he would just pick some docile-looking girl from among the hundreds who would be delighted to marry him.

What happened to that, hm?

And where had Kiyoka's typically cool, icy demeanor gone? Here he was, acting like the picture of a doting husband now that he'd met the woman who was probably his true love.

At least I was right about the girl being docile-looking.

Godo took another good look at Kiyoka's fiancée, this Miyo Saimori.

This would be his first time really meeting her, and his first impression of her was that she was trim and tidy. She was modest, innocent, and the way she looked when she was embarrassed was kind of cute. He did worry that she might be a little too skinny—she looked like she could vanish at any moment—but overall, most men would probably like her.

To be perfectly honest, Godo was incredibly jealous.

As he made his way to the sitting room, he leaned over on a whim to tease Kiyoka, making sure his voice was low enough

What Godo Saw

by Akumi Agitogi

TO Yoshito Godo, Kiyoka Kudo was the man who served as his superior, and he was—to be perfectly and rudely honest—utterly unsociable. And that worried him.

His age was a bit past the prime for marrying.

Despite that, here he was with good looks, a good pedigree, and a good salary. Anyone would think he was the picture of perfection. All he had to do was stand there and he'd have his pick of women who wanted him both for marriage and for fooling around. Rarely were men so lucky.

And yet, his dry old stick of a superior officer had absolutely no interest in women.

In all his years working alongside Kiyoka, Godo had wondered more than a handful of times if the Kudo heir was actually interested in men instead. The thought always came to him whenever they visited restaurants where beautiful women would serve them and pour their drinks. The most beautiful and most popular girl working at the establishment could come up to Kiyoka and he would treat her with indifference; she could cuddle up to him and he would shoo her away like a common fly. Forget agreeing to chat with them; he wouldn't even give them a smile.

Considering all of that, Godo didn't feel too bad about suspecting that Kiyoko may like men—after all, he spent every day in an exclusively male workplace, buried in his work.

That's why I never would have predicted this in my wildest dreams.

I KNOW I CAN BE A HANDFUL.

BUT WILL YOU STILL...

...MARRY ME?

NEXT VOLUME

THIS TALE OF ROMANCE BEGINS WITH MARRIAGE.

I CAN'T SAY I'M GOOD FOR MUCH, BUT...

Signed:
Kiyoka Kuda
Miyo Saimori

MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

Continues in Volume 3

MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

2

ORIGINAL CONCEPT
AKUMI AGITOGI
(Fujimi L Bunko/KADOKAWA)

ART
RITO KOHSAKA

CHARACTER DESIGN
TSUKIHO TSUKIOKA

Translator: Jasmine Bernhardt ◆ Letterer: Lys Blakeslee
Logo Designer: Wendy Chan (Yen Press)
Cover Designer: Abigail Blackman ◆ Editor: Sarah Tangney

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